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310923Z Oct 02

2002HANOI02628 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00
	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OPIC-01	PRS-00	P-00	SP-00	IRM-00
	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00
	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/007W				

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7970
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 002628

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL 10/31/2012
TAGS: [PHUM KIRF VM HUMANR EMIN RELFREE](#)
SUBJECT: PRESSURE ON HIGHLAND PROTESTANTS

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY POL/C SCOTT BELLARD; REASON
1.5(D)

2. (C) SUMMARY: PROTESTANT CONTACTS REPORT
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SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED DIFFICULTIES IN THE CENTRAL
HIGHLANDS PROVINCE OF DAK LAK, WITH CONDITIONS FOR
PROTESTANTS DESCRIBED AS THE MOST RESTRICTIVE SINCE
THE LATE 1970'S. HMONG PROTESTANTS IN THE
NORTHWESTERN PROVINCE OF LAI CHAU REPORT
"CONSIDERABLE" PRESSURE TO RENOUNCE THEIR FAITH, WHILE
IN THE NEIGHBORING PROVINCE OF LAO CAI, DISTRICT
AUTHORITIES ALLOW PROTESTANTS TO PRACTICE THEIR
RELIGION PRIVATELY. THESE DEVELOPMENTS HIGHLIGHT THE
BROAD VARIATIONS IN TREATMENT PROTESTANTS RECEIVE FROM
AUTHORITIES IN DIFFERENT JURISDICTIONS. THE NORTHERN
EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM (ECVN) IS ATTEMPTING
FORMALLY TO ACCEPT SEVERAL HUNDRED MOSTLY HMONG
CONGREGATIONS INTO ITS RANKS, ALTHOUGH THE GVN MAY NOT
PERMIT THIS. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) IN THREE SEPARATE MEETINGS FROM OCTOBER 12 TO
OCTOBER 18, PROTESTANT HOUSE CHURCH LEADER PASTOR
"STEPHEN" AND A THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL (TCN) WHO HAS
REQUESTED THAT HIS NAME NOT BE USED INFORMED POLOFF OF
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING VIETNAM'S CHRISTIANS,
ESPECIALLY PROTESTANTS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND
NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS. BOTH SOURCES HAVE PROVIDED
RELIABLE INFORMATION TO THE MISSION IN THE PAST.
PASTOR STEPHEN NOTED THAT HIS INFORMATION WAS MOSTLY
SECOND-HAND, PASSED TO HIM FROM PROTESTANT PASTORS AND
LEADERS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND NORTHWEST WHO
LOOK TO HIM FOR LEADERSHIP AND ASSISTANCE. THE TCN
IDENTIFIED HIS SOURCES AS AN EDE PASTOR, Y KEH
(PHONETIC), WHOM HE SAYS HE HAS KNOWN FOR OVER THIRTY
YEARS, AS WELL AS VARIOUS PROTESTANTS IN HANOI WHOM HE
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CALLED "LONG-STANDING ASSOCIATES."

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

4. (C) PASTOR STEPHEN DESCRIBED A THREE-DAY
CONFERENCE DURING JULY IN DAK LAK IN WHICH GVN
AUTHORITIES REACHED A DECISION TO "PURIFY
PROTESTANTISM IN VIETNAM." HE CLAIMED THAT THIS MEANT
"DESTROYING," OR AT LEAST "LIMITING" PROTESTANTISM.
HE REPORTED THAT PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT-LEVEL
PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE LEADERS FROM KON TUM, GIA LAI, LAM
DONG, AND DAK LAK PROVINCES ATTENDED THE MEETING, BUT
SAID THAT HE DID NOT KNOW IF NATIONAL-LEVEL OFFICIALS
PARTICIPATED. THE INFORMATION, HE INDICATED, CAME
FROM SECRETLY CHRISTIAN OFFICIALS WHO HAD ATTENDED THE
MEETINGS. SEPARATELY, THE TCN CLAIMED THAT LOCAL

SECURITY OFFICIALS WERE TELLING SOME PROTESTANT BELIEVERS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS THAT INSTRUCTIONS TO ACT AGAINST THEM CAME FROM THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

DAK LAK

15. (C) BOTH PASTOR STEPHEN AND THE TCN SAID THAT THE SITUATION IN DAK LAK HAD BECOME "DRAMATICALLY WORSE" SINCE AUGUST. THE TCN OPINED THAT THIS WAS SOMEWHAT SURPRISING BECAUSE GIA LAI HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN GENERALLY TOUGHER AGAINST PROTESTANTS. ACCORDING TO HIS SOURCE Y KEH, DAK LAK AUTHORITIES PROHIBIT ALL MEETINGS, CLOSELY CONTROL MOVEMENT BY BOTH ETHNIC
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MINORITIES AND MAJORITY KINH, AND GENERALLY MAINTAIN TIGHTER CONTROL, MORE SO THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE THE LATE 1970'S. THE TCN REVIEWED THREE DIFFERENT INCIDENTS IN WHICH PEOPLE HAVE REPORTEDLY "DISAPPEARED" IN DAK LAK.

16. (C) IN THE FIRST "DISAPPEARANCE," REPORTED ORIGINALLY BY THE WIFE OF A HOUSE CHURCH PASTOR, A DISTRICT PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE IN DAK LAK INVITED THE PASTOR TO DINNER IN EARLY AUGUST -- AN "ODD" EVENT, ACCORDING TO THE TCN. THE PASTOR NEVER RETURNED FROM THE DINNER, ALTHOUGH THE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE CLAIMED THAT HE HAD LEFT IN GOOD CONDITION AND EVEN SHOWED HIS WIFE AN UNSPECIFIED DOCUMENT THAT THE PASTOR HAD PURPORTEDLY SIGNED DURING THE DINNER.

17. (C) IN THE SECOND INCIDENT, DISTRICT-LEVEL POLICE IN DAK LAK DETAINED ABOUT 240 PERSONS AT A SUNDAY GATHERING ON EITHER AUGUST 18 OR AUGUST 25. IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER THIS WAS A WORSHIP SERVICE, BUT ALL THOSE GATHERED WERE REPORTEDLY ETHNIC MINORITY PROTESTANTS. AUTHORITIES RELEASED "MOST" WITHIN A FEW HOURS TO A FEW DAYS, BUT, AS OF MID-OCTOBER, 47 HAD

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7971
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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NOT RETURNED HOME. POLICE HAVE NOT ACKNOWLEDGED HOLDING THEM. THEIR ASSOCIATES FEARED THAT THEY HAD "DISAPPEARED."

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18. (C) ON AUGUST 28, IN M'DRAK DISTRICT IN NORTHEASTERN DAK LAK, SECURITY FORCES REPORTEDLY ATTEMPTED TO DETAIN A HOUSE CHURCH PASTOR AND HIS TWO ADULT SONS. A GROUP OF LOCAL PEOPLE GATHERED AND PREVENTED THE AUTHORITIES FROM CARRYING OUT THEIR PLANS. THE AUTHORITIES LEFT, BUT LATER RETURNED WITH REINFORCEMENTS. A TOTAL OF ABOUT 120 LOCAL RESIDENTS GATHERED TO PROTECT THE PASTOR AND HIS SONS. IN THE ENSUING "DONNYBROOK," AS THE TCN DESCRIBED IT, ONE VILLAGER WAS SHOT IN THE FOOT OR THE LEG (APPARENTLY THE WOUND WAS NOT SERIOUS) AND AUTHORITIES DETAINED ALL 120 VILLAGERS. AGAIN, AUTHORITIES QUICKLY RELEASED MOST, BUT AS OF MID-OCTOBER, BETWEEN 20 AND 30 HAD NOT RETURNED HOME. AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT ACKNOWLEDGED DETAINING THEM. THE PASTOR AND HIS SONS ALSO REPORTEDLY HAVE NOT BEEN SEEN SINCE AUGUST 28.

THE HMONG

19. (C) ALSO IN AUGUST, ACCORDING TO THE TCN, HMONG "SPONTANEOUS MIGRANTS" WHO HAD MOVED TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS FROM THEIR HOMES IN THE NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS BEGINNING IN THE MID- TO LATE-1990'S, RECEIVED VISITS FROM OFFICIALS OF THEIR HOME PROVINCES. THESE OFFICIALS, WITH COOPERATION FROM CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AUTHORITIES, WERE REPORTEDLY TRYING TO INDUCE THE HMONG TO MOVE BACK TO THE NORTHWEST. THE TCN SAID THAT IT WAS NOT CLEAR WHAT MEANS THEY WERE USING TO CONVINCE THE HMONG TO DO THIS. SO FAR, NONE OF THE HMONG ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE INVITATION TO

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RETURN TO THE NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS. (NOTE: AT LEAST SOME REPORTS SUGGEST THAT THE PRIMARY REASON THE HMONG MOVED TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WAS TO HAVE MORE FREEDOM TO PRACTICE PROTESTANTISM. END NOTE.)

A BRIGHTER PICTURE IN LAU CAI

10. (C) ACCORDING TO PASTOR STEPHEN, DURING THE SUMMER, POLICE IN BAO YEN DISTRICT OF LAU CAI INFORMED LOCAL HMONG PROTESTANTS THAT, WHILE THEY COULD NOT GATHER TO WORSHIP, THEY COULD PRACTICE THEIR FAITH IN THEIR HOMES. POLICE ARE REPORTEDLY HONORING THIS ARRANGEMENT, BASED ON THE GVN'S CURRENT DECREE ON RELIGION.

FOUR FAMILIES FROM DIEN BIEN DONG

11. (C) ACCORDING TO PASTOR STEPHEN, ON APRIL 12, 2001, OFFICIALS OF DIEN BIEN DONG DISTRICT OF LAI CHAU CAME TO PHINH GIANG VILLAGE AND URGED THE FIVE PROTESTANT FAMILIES AMONG THE 40 FAMILIES IN THE VILLAGE TO RENOUNCE THEIR FAITH "BECAUSE THE VILLAGE IS NOT PROTESTANT." ONE FAMILY COMPLIED, BUT THE OTHER FOUR REFUSED. THE AUTHORITIES THEN TOLD THE FOUR FAMILIES THAT THEY HAD TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE. POLICE AND MILITIA REPORTEDLY THREW ALL OF THEIR BELONGINGS OUT OF THEIR HOUSES AND BEAT ONE OF THE FAMILY HEADS, MUA BUA SINH, UNTIL BLOOD CAME FROM HIS MOUTH AND NOSE. SINH'S WIFE REPORTEDLY FINALLY

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PERSUADED HIM TO LEAVE AND THE FOUR FAMILIES GATHERED THEIR BELONGINGS AND DEPARTED FOR A VILLAGE IN DIEN BIEN PHU DISTRICT, AN HOUR'S WALK AWAY. PASTOR STEPHEN CLAIMED TO HAVE HEARD THIS ACCOUNT FROM MUA BUA SINH'S BROTHER AND ALSO GAVE POLOFF COPIES OF SEVERAL LETTERS OF COMPLAINT THE FAMILIES WROTE TO VARIOUS GVN OFFICIALS.

12. (C) DIEN BIEN PHU DISTRICT OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY DID NOT ALLOW THE FAMILIES TO REGISTER THEIR RESIDENCES IN THAT DISTRICT AND HAVE SOMETIMES HARASSED THEM AS WELL. PASTOR STEPHEN SAID THAT MUA BUA SINH EVENTUALLY DIED ON JULY 8, 2002 AS A RESULT OF THE APRIL 12, 2001 BEATING, ALTHOUGH HE WAS UNABLE TO EXPLAIN WHY THE BEATING WAS DIRECTLY RELATED TO SINH'S DEATH. PASTOR STEPHEN GAVE POLOFF A PHOTO OF SINH'S CORPSE. SINH'S WIDOW AND SIX CHILDREN MOVED TO SON LA PROVINCE LATER IN JULY, FOLLOWED IN AUGUST BY TWO OF THE OTHER FAMILIES. THE THREE FAMILIES HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO REGISTER THEIR RESIDENCE IN SON LA PROVINCE EITHER, BUT OFFICIALS THERE REPORTEDLY LEAVE THEM ALONE. MUA BUA SINH'S BROTHER'S FAMILY IS REPORTEDLY STILL IN DIEN BIEN PHU DISTRICT.

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TUAN GIAO DISTRICT IN LAI CHAU

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13. (C) PASTOR STEPHEN REPORTED THAT IN EARLY OCTOBER THE LEADERS OF FIVE PROTESTANT HOUSE CHURCHES IN TUAN GIAO DISTRICT OF LAI CHAU HAD MET HIM IN HANOI AND DESCRIBED EVENTS IN THEIR DISTRICT. THERE HAD BEEN 21 PROTESTANT HOUSE CHURCHES IN THE DISTRICT, BUT BEGINNING EARLY IN 2002, AUTHORITIES BEGAN PRESSURING THEM TO ABANDON THEIR FAITH. SECURITY FORCES, INCLUDING "REGULAR POLICE" AND "BORDER POLICE," ACCORDING TO PASTOR STEPHEN, HAVE BEEN APPEARING EVERY WEEK AT HOUSE CHURCH SERVICES TO TELL WORSHIPERS THAT "THOSE WHO DO NOT DENY CHRIST ARE ANTI-COMMUNIST," THAT "PROTESTANTISM IS AN AMERICAN RELIGION," AND THAT "IF YOU INTEND TO KEEP YOUR FAITH YOU SHOULD LEAVE AND GO TO AMERICA." THE APPARENT LEADER OF THIS CAMPAIGN WAS THE VICE-CHIEF OF THE PROVINCIAL POLICE. PASTOR STEPHEN SAID THAT 16 OF THE HOUSE CHURCH CONGREGATIONS ARE NOW DEFUNCT, BUT THAT THE OTHER FIVE ARE STILL OPERATING.

THE ECVN REACHES OUT TO HMONG HOUSE CHURCHES

14. (C) THE TCN TOLD POLOFF THAT THE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED ECVN'S GOVERNING BOARD HAD DECIDED IN MID-SEPTEMBER TO TAKE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS FROM HMONG HOUSE CHURCHES. (NOTE: THE ECVN ELECTED THE CURRENT BOARD IN 1988; ONLY THREE OF THE FIVE MEMBERS ELECTED THEN ARE STILL ALIVE, BUT THE ECVN HAS NOT BEEN PERMITTED TO HOLD NEW ELECTIONS OR HOLD A CONGRESS. END NOTE.) THE ECVN RECEIVED OVER 300 APPLICATIONS AND, BY OCTOBER 16, THE BOARD HAD APPROVED

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APPLICATIONS FROM 204 HMONG CONGREGATIONS IN LAI CHAU, 22 IN LAO CAI, AND ONE NON-HMONG CONGREGATION IN THAI NGUYEN. THE BOARD STILL HAD ABOUT 100 APPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER. THE TCN SAID THAT HE DID NOT KNOW IF ANY WERE REFUSED. ON OCTOBER 20, THE TCN PROVIDED CONGEN HCMC POLOFF A LIST OF THE 227 APPROVED CONGREGATIONS, ALONG WITH A SAMPLE APPLICATION LETTER FROM ONE HMONG CONGREGATION DATED JULY 17, 2002 AND AN ECVN APPROVAL FORM FOR ANOTHER CONGREGATION DATED OCTOBER 9, 2002. THE 227 CONGREGATIONS LISTED RANGED IN SIZE FROM 470 TO 25 MEMBERS. THE ECVN CURRENTLY CLAIMS ABOUT 8,000 MEMBERS IN ONLY 14 CONGREGATIONS. THE ECVN HAS NOT INFORMED THE GVN ABOUT THIS ACTION YET, THE TCN STATED. COMMENTING ON THIS UNUSUALLY BOLD MOVE, THE TCN SAID THAT THE ECVN BOARD PROBABLY FELT THAT IT "HAD NOTHING TO LOSE."

15. (C) COMMENT: THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT THERE REMAIN WIDE DISPARITIES BETWEEN HOW AUTHORITIES IN DIFFERENT PROVINCES, EVEN IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS, TREAT PROTESTANTS IN THEIR JURISDICTIONS. THE ECVN'S MOVE TO INTEGRATE HMONG PROTESTANT HOUSE CHURCHES REFLECTS THE INDEPENDENCE THE CHURCH HAS ASSERTED IN REFUSING TO ACCEPT THE GVN'S CONDITIONS FOR HOLDING AN ANNUAL MEETING SINCE 1988. ECVN TIES TO THE HMONG DATE BACK AT LEAST TO THE EARLY 1990'S. THE ECVN'S INFORMAL LEADER, PASTOR AU QUANG VINH OF HANOI, HAS EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTIES WITH THE AUTHORITIES SINCE 1994, WHEN HE HELPED PUBLISH AN UNAUTHORIZED HMONG LANGUAGE BIBLE. THE GVN HAS CLAIMED THAT THE HMONG DO NOT REALLY UNDERSTAND PROTESTANTISM AND ARE OFTEN

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DECEIVED BY CHARLATANS SEEKING THEIR OWN BENEFIT. THE ECVN ACTIONS FORMALLY TO WELCOME HMONG HOUSE CHURCHES MAY BRING THIS ISSUE TO A NEW BOIL.
BURGHARDT

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